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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practicality and feasibility of the public school administrator permitting those concerned, faculty, students, parents and interested citizens, to participate in the decision making process of the local school. An added purpose was to find applicable and effective ways the principal could support meaningful participatory decision making opportunities. Traditional administrative hierarchy and indifferent communities necessitated restructuring decision making techniques, particularly regarding information input. The process forced faculty and administration to critically examine preconceived notions about responsibility in the school; about who can and should make decisions. It also forced the administration, faculty and community to examine their own abilities and skills in working cooperatively with others in a collegial environment. The results indicated that today's education reform dictates a different approach to school organization and operation, one characterized by openness and participation by all segments of the school clientele. (53 references) (Author)

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THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

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A paper prepared to presentation at the **Conference-within-a-Convention** at the annual meeting of the **American Association of School Administrators** in San Diego, CA on February 22, 1992.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practicality and feasibility of the public school administrator permitting those concerned, faculty, students, parents and interested citizens, to participate in the decision making process of the local school. An added purpose was to find applicable and effective ways the principal could support meaningful participatory decision making opportunities.

Traditional administrative hierarchy and indifferent communities necessitated restructuring decision making techniques, particularly regarding information input. The process forced faculty and administration to critically examine preconceived notions about responsibility in the school; about who can and should make decisions. It also forced the administration, faculty and community to examine their own abilities and skills in working cooperatively with others in a collegial environment. The results indicated that today's education reform dictates a different approach to school organization and operation, one characterized by openness and participation by all segments of the school clientele.

INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck in his great novel The Grapes of Wrath wrote about power and ownership and what he called "the little screaming facts that sound through all history." An attempt to paraphrase Steinbeck in the current vernacular of power and decision making might sound like this---

> And the current leaders, who must share their power in the restructuring process, the leaders with access to history and to knowledge, the leaders with access to history and to knowledge, those who know the great fact: When power accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: When the majority of the people are powerless they will assume power through force. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: that repression of knowledge and power merely serves to strengthen and knit those deprived of knowledge and power. These same leaders ignored the cries of history and their every effort was directed at limiting access to knowledge and power. The effort that might have gone to growth and improvement was spent to control and intimidate in an attempt to protect their power. Change was ignored, and plans for change ignored: and only personal power was considered, while the powerless hungered---the causes of revolt continued (Free, 1990, 1).

The rationale for participatory decision making as the process used to facilitate student centered decisions is based on the proposition that decisions should be made at the lowest possible level. Thus, the school should be the primary decision making unit. Many districts that are implementing participatory decision making are reacting to a perceived need to significantly change educational practice: to empower school staffs to create conditions in schools that facilitate improvement, innovation, and continuous professional growth (David, 1989). The trend toward greater reliance on participatory decision making, coupled with an increasingly diverse work force, has forced many school district to find new techniques that are substantially different from the individualistic practices they currently employ (Ilgen, 1986).

Participatory decision making requires recognition that when the impetus and authority for school improvement emanates from outside the school it does not produce the responsibility

and commitment necessary to sustain improvement (Mojkowski & Fleming, 1988). Research consistently indicates that top down change has rarely been effective; "there will be no effective change in education unless employees at the worksite are involved in making change" (Reed, 1988).

PURPOSES

Ordway Tead defined administration as "the necessary activities those individuals in an organization who are charged with ordering, forwarding and facilitating the associated efforts of a group of individuals brought together to realize certain defined purposes" (1951, p. 4). He further maintained that an individual's best talents are utilized under "conditions which he has helped to determine and which he cherishes because he finds them helpful to his most satisfying self-expression and growth" (Tead, 1951, p. 59).

The paper purposes to examine the literature and research available on participatory decision making, particularly in relation to definitions, and philosophical and theoretical foundations. Further, the paper purposes to demonstrate why participatory decisions may improve instruction, and to gain adoption of participatory decision making as an acceptable alternative to traditional bureaucracy as a decision making model in public schools.

There are at least three basic philosophical foundations which support participatory decision making as an effective management process: 1) change should be student-centered and therefore decisions should be made as close to the student as possible (Lewis, 1989); 2) change requires ownership that comes from the opportunity to participate in defining change and the flexibility to adapt it to individual circumstances (Conner & Lake, 1988): stated otherwise, change does not result from externally imposed practices; and, 3) knowledge is power--effective decisions require good and timely information (Hall, 1991). Zander (1977) specifies that group motivation to change is based on several conditions:

> the group repeating a given task periodically (instead of generating a single product and disbanding), the amount or quality of results from the joint product being visible to the members, the members developing some idea about how well the group will do in the future, and each and every member

contributing to some degree to helping the group complete its work (p. 38-39).

Are the decisions of a group necessarily better than an individual principal? In other words, is the end result worth the effort? Schmuck and Blumberg (1969) speculated that

> Where efficiency depends on continued coordination and interaction of persons, a decision produced by the group to be involved will almost always be superior to one produced by even the most capable of individuals (p. 89).

BACKGROUND POLICY ISSUES

Do policy makers tell the schools to begin participatory decision making or do they find a way to make every one in the process feel ownership as they attempt to solve the problems at the closest point to the source. Addressing the issue at the policy table, either at the school or district level, is the only way all partners are going to become truly a part of the process and be knowledgeable of their roles. School administrators and teachers both have legitimate roles to play in the policy process. One cannot forget that the school board also is a crucial link to the community and must balance the role to ensure that authority is appropriately shared (Phillips, 1989).

In the development of policy involving participatory decision making, a critical component, crucial to the central administration, the board and the building level management, is clearly defining the parameters of the decision making process at both the district and the building level. Before the school board considers participatory decision making at the school level, it should study extensively what the effect will be on present policy.

Prior to beginning a shared decision making process at the building level, a policy needs to be developed identifying participants and setting the guidelines for participation (Phillips, 1989). The board should define the respective roles of administrators and teachers as well as other staff members which can establish a process for appropriate decision making. Establishing a policy addressing concerns prior to implementation eliminates many problems resulting from individuals attempting to negotiate positions.

IMPLEMENTATION

The largest obstacle to participatory decision making is how the program should be implemented. When the mechanics of participatory decision making are implemented, many people may be uncomfortable with their changed roles. This phenomenon may be a result of "disturbing the way things are" syndrome. People often become distressed when structure is altered, even a non-effective structure.

Principals cannot say to faculty "this is the process of teacher empowerment, take it, use it, you are now empowered." Such an action would further the case for bureaucracy, not participation. Moeller (1964, p. 140) stated that: "Bureaucracy in school system organizations induces in teachers a sense of powerlessness to affect school system policy. The general level of sense of power in a school system varies inversely to the degree bureaucratization."

The failure of some participatory decision making attempts can be illustrated through the improper training of the principal, faculty and staff to implement the total process. The principal must spend the time and develop the expertise to provide the staff development necessary to guarantee successful implementation.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Experience dictates a step-by-step process of awareness. There are three separate and distinct steps: conceptual development, role definition, and decision making (see figure one). The first step is conceptual development which involves the faculty, the administration, and the community in developing a common sense, a common definition, of what participatory decision making really means. The terms teacher empowerment, site-based management, participatory management, decentralization, shared decision making, and school based management are all included under the general rubric of participatory decision making. But what is participatory decision making? What does it mean to the faculty, the administration, the community, and the staff of the individual school? Conceptual development implies that all those affected by this phenomenon must be given opportunity to have input into the meaning of the process. The definition must be agreeable to all those involved, particularly at

the individual school. This definition has no meaning for a school fifty miles down the road, nor for someone in the state capital, nor for someone in North Carolina or California. The only limitation is: what does participatory decision making mean for the individual school, its faculty, the administration, and the community? Unless the interested groups reach consensus on a common definition of what they are working toward, any other attempts to implement the process would be prefunctory.

Two basic beliefs are incorporated in most of these definitions: a) those closest to the decision should play a significant role in making those decisions , and b) decisions will be most effective and long-lasting when a sense of ownership and responsibility is developed by participating in the decision making process.

Consequently, when teachers and principals have developed a clear understanding of their desired expectations, a common belief could emerge: teaching effectively will increase student learning. Belief in that commitment and a set of principles could put in motion a positive set of student expectations. A shared sense of ownership, then, results in shared leadership to create success for students (Chopra, 1989).

ROLE DEFINITION

The second step in this process is role definition. Smith and Peterson (1988) define role as "a label for the set of expectations about an individual's behavior" (p. 73). Role definition means that in a participatory decision making school, roles must be altered. Teachers, faculty, staff, community, and administration, must alter or modify roles they have traditionally expected from each other. No longer can faculty expect, nor should they expect, principals to make all the day-to-day operational decisions. After all, that is what many faculty members want, teacher empowerment, the idea of making decisions about those things that effect them on a day-to-day basis.

The roles of all participants must be changed, not just faculty expectation for the principal, but faculty and administration expectations for the community and their involvement in the school. For example, how does the faculty and administration in a participatory decision making school propose to involve the 75 percent of the community that

do not have students in school? How do they propose to involve community and parents who have been characterized as apathetic, not caring, uninterested, and not desiring involvement in the day-to-day operation of the school? How can they involve community and change the expectation of the community when it appears a wall has been built up between community and school? Perhaps a more basic question is: does the school want the community involved in the school? Purkey and Smith (1983) indicate that "a few studies find parental involvement and support to be a major factor in student achievement" (p. 444). The answer to these questions really lies in addressing role definition. What are the roles that each of the participants must play is this process?

Many studies have found that role theory leads to understanding the potential for feeling privileged as a consequence of superior status, or feeling underprivileged as a consequence of perceived inferior status. As such social expectations are the roles associated with particular positions (Stryker, 1980). Messe, Kerr and Sattler (1992) speculate that "in organizations persons with superior status both have an inflated view of their own worth and undervalue the needs and contributions of their subordinates" (p. 209). In participatory decision making feelings of superiority must be abandoned and feelings of inferiority must be eliminated.

Stryker and Statham (1985) postulate that role provides the basic means for linking the individual with the larger organization, without losing either the individual or the system. Current research makes it clear that the empowerment of site level personnel, especially teachers through access to decision-making and the increased knowledge and status implied in the process, improves both morale and instruction (Maeroff, 1988). Watkins specifies that administrators must "harbour the growth and support the diverse interest groups who may incorporate a critical element into the decision making process (1986, p. 101). However, according to the Carnegie Foundation (1988), teachers

> do not help to select teachers and administrators (only about 10 percent) at their schools, nor are they asked to participate in such crucial matters as teacher evaluation, staff development, budget, student placement, promotion and retention policies, and standards of student conduct (p. 36).

What does the administrator, particularly the principal and supervisor, stand to gain from this process? Principals are quite often the first line of resistance to site based decision-making most often because of fear or ignorance (Kirkpatrick, 1985). Using participatory decision making, the principal acts as executive officer, who by delegated authority, directs instructional improvement, and is involved to a much greater degree with the important school functions. A pilot program in Dade County Florida reported that "principal and teachers in the pilot program reported being tired from the extra work, but thrilled at being part of a revolution in the making" (Dreyfuss, 1988).

The principal, who shares instructional leadership with teachers, does not give up the responsibility for leadership. The principal, who shares power with teachers, is still a leader. The principal, who is able to spend more of time preparing schools to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century because of participatory decision making, is a more effective leader (Cunard, 1990). Most principals are not comfortable with change which is not clearly defined and leaves the chance for many unknowns, and most will admit they were not trained to work with participatory decision making procedures. Robert Holzmiller, principal of Hopi Elementary School in Scottsdale, Ariz. says he is not ashamed to admit has district movement to site-based decision making has left him scared (as cited in Bradley, 1990). The distinct fact that principals are scared tells us basically they are not prepared for the task of being a principal of a participatory decision making team. Preparing the principal to facilitate the team is no easy job.

Mary Hatwood Futrell, past president of the National Education Association (as quoted in Lewis, 1989) states that "as shared decision-making becomes the norm, we hope administrators, far from feeling threatened, will welcome the collegial decision making process" (p. 81). Similarly, Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers (as quoted in Lewis, 1989) reports that

> one of the greatest assets of any school system is the collective knowledge and experience of its teaching staff--and its untapped potential to acquire more. An effective administrator will, therefore, find ways of activating this asset (p. 85-86).

As the source of decision making changes, the role of the different administrative levels must undergo a similar change. Supervisors will likely have different functions in this new environment. The role of central office personnel will become to a large extent that of support to the site, particularly resources and information. James E. Mitchell, Superintendent of Northglenn District # 12 in Colorado, indicates that traditional power lies under the central office's control--both in terms of money and information. "Our responsibility under site based management," he writes, "is not only to support these schools with resources and information, but also to ask the right question" (Mitchell, 1990, p. 23). Central office personnel will still be an integral part of the educational community because of the need for good, timely information and the importance of some coordination of efforts between schools. However, these positions "could disappear if school systems further decentralize responsibilities to school sites and decision making is flattened in the organizational pyramids of school districts" (Lewis, 1989, p. 100).

HOW DECISION ARE MADE

The third step in the participatory decision making process, is an examination of how decisions are made. Who makes decisions in school? What kinds of decisions are made? What is the generic process of making decisions? Are there different models for examining how decisions are made, or who needs to make decisions? Decision making at its best is a complex structure with many complicated tasks involved. If the organization is to be efficient where a myriad of decisions are made, people and programs are coordinated, communication channelled, positions allocated, staff recruited, schedules developed, and resources obtained and utilized, then decision making must be shared (Garcia, 1986).

In this segment of the process principals and teachers must examine how decisions are made in the schools and who is involved in making those decisions. Research indicates that one of the real weaknesses of participatory decision making was the inability of teachers to understand how decisions are made (Persing, 1989). According to Jane Stallings ( ), teachers make as many as five thousand instructional decisions per day. But instructional decisions

are different from administrative or management decisions which often involve other people, peers for example. Instructional decisions are made about such things as do "I continue to teach addition now or should I stop and go on to language arts," or "how can I best get this particular student to understand this math concept and what multiplication really means" or "how can I better help this student understand how to spell phonetically." All are examples of instructional decisions that teachers make constantly in the classroom. With participatory decision making decisions are moved out of the classroom and into peer relationships. For example, who is responsible for bus duty this week? How do we decide who is responsible for bus duty? Should aides be hired to handle bus duty rather than teachers? Should bus duty be a decision involving the faculty, or is that an administrative decision? How should personnel resources be allocated? How should teachers be assigned to classrooms, to grades, to subjects? Those are curriculum or personnel decisions that teachers have to understand before participatory decision making will function effectively and efficiently. Teachers need training in how to process information, how to collect data, how to examine different alternatives available, and then ultimately how to make a decision.

Another problem teachers confront in work groups is a lack of experience with debating issues and building consensus. Working on group dynamics and the art of compromise early in the transition period may be time well spent and critical to group decision making and consensus (Rummler, 1989). It will be helpful if teachers learn the essential relationship between autonomy and accountability. Making decisions can lead to conflict and mistakes even when the group finds a solution to a problem, often a new set of challenges appears.

This decision making process also implies one other important facet, accountability. If teachers are to be involved in making decisions, then they must be held accountable for those decisions, just as administrators are held accountable. If there is teacher involvement in decision making, they must be willing to take the responsibility for the decisions they make. According to Phil Schlecty (as quoted in Lewis, 1989) "teachers and principals are only accountable for doing right the things they are expected to do" (p. 102). In fact, school "survival no longer can be seen as a simple proof of fitness" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 25).

DO TEACHERS WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION MAKING?

Principals often ask the question, do teachers really want to be involved in making decisions? Teachers talk about empowerment, about making decisions, but do teachers really want to take the time, the effort, and the energy that is required for participatory decision making. According to Richardson and Long (1991)

> Can . . . teachers who are burned out or turned off be enlivened to become productive teachers again? Some of the best researchers say yes. They indicate that much of the 'dry bones' effect is due to undesirable teaching climates, that many good teacher are simply suffocated by an unsympathetic system: good teaching goes unrewarded; poor teaching goes unnoticed or unpunished, and system survival is the functional philosophy of the school (p. 22).

Empowering teachers is the key to a new life for American education. Frymier (1987) suggested that teachers are locked into a system that blunts teacher enthusiasm and stifles creativity. "Neutering" is the label Frymier uses to describe this condition: "neutered teachers lack physical strength and energy, enthusiasm for their work, and motivation" (1987, p. 12). The answer to the question of teacher involvement in decision making can only be answered at the school level.

There may be situations in which teachers do not feel comfortable participating in the process. Teachers should not be forced into participatory decision making just to be involved (Kirkpatrick, 1985). Rather, the structure for participatory decision making "should be flexible enough to allow for varying rates of participation" (Newell, 1978, p. 140). The structure should be appropriate for the task. Different tasks require different structures (Blau & Scott, 1962). Some evidence also suggests that teachers having the opportunity to participate is more important than actually participating in making the decision (Hoffman & Maier, 1959). It should be noted that not all teachers desire to participate in this new professionalism, yet do not wish to be treated as "second-class citizens" (Lewis, 1989, p. 88). Shaw and Blum (1965) also report that "data suggest that group members are more likely to signal their true feelings to the group when this can be done anonymously than when signals are public" (p. 153).

It is ironic that participatory decision making which implies that decisions are made at the lowest possible level, was mandated by the Kentucky Legislature as a part of their reform effort to be implemented at every school in the state. How ironic that the concept of local autonomy is actually mandated from the state level. Again this is a reflection of the top down mentality that has been so pervasive in most of the educational reform system which ultimately led to the down fall of most reform programs because they were mandated without grass-roots level support.

The research sociologist Kurt Lewin (1947), states that reform can only be meaningful, long lasting, and beneficial when it springs forth from the grass-roots level rather than being mandated top down. Meade (1979) reported that "lasting and significant changes would not occur unless teachers were directly and actively involved in the planning and development of the desired changes" (p. 89).

DO PRINCIPALS WANT TO SHARE DECISION MAKING?

A fundamental question is, do principals really want teachers and community members involved in decision making? Do principals really believe that participatory decision making will be beneficial to them or do they see it as a threat to their power, their authority, their role and their function in the school (Richardson & Long, 1991). Traditional thinking implies that power is the ability to make someone do something they would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1963). Filly, House, and Kerr (1976) examined power as the ability to have social influence over others. French and Raven (1959) examined power from five different perspectives, meaning that people could have power in any of five different ways: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power. According to a study by Dykes (1964):

> The study findings suggests that the source of much of the tension between faculty and administration is a conviction held by many faculty members that any increase in administrative power and influence must necessarily result in a decrease in their own. . .The administration and faculty are seen as adversaries competing for a limited quantity of influence (405).

Power is really something that is given to the leader by the followers. Power is not something that can be arbitrarily taken, but it is something that must be given. The followers must acquiesce to the power of the leader for there to be power involved. So do principals want to give up their power? Do they want to give up perceived decision making power?

Blumberg (1969) states

> The abdication of a traditional hierarchical system, on the part of the principal, in favor of a participative mode does not necessarily mean that he will lose influence over the environment. The results may be, as seems to be the case here, that he attains more influence over matters of substance that are more important to him than matters of procedure. The extension of power within the organization tends to multiply the total amount of power residing in the organization (p. 51).

Participatory decision making does not imply that principals give up power. Participatory decision making is not power-over, but a power-with concept, meaning that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Principal and faculty can combine their separate power into an organization that is more powerful than the two groups separately. Participatory decision making becomes power with, not power over, or power against. Participatory decision making reduces the fighting "for power" because each entity must use its power for the organization to be successful. Consequently, each group, faculty and principal, must know and understand their role and function in the process.

THREE DOMAINS

The three steps outlined above: conceptual development, role definition, and decision making are part of the overall first domain of this project, planning. The planning domain, is the synergistic planning model which was developed by Richardson and others (Richardson, et al, 1991). Basically, the concept of synergistic planning implies everyone is involved in the planning process. This contrasts to strategic planning, in the sense that in strategic planning people are involved through the linking-pin cycle. Likerts (1967) linking-pin theory mean that

those at lower levels are connected to high levels by one person from their group being representative at the next highest level. The concept employed in synergistic planning means that all people must be involved in planning process. The planning process is too important to be left to committees to develop all the needed steps for implementation; everyone must to be involved. This involvement can be accomplished through a variety of methods.

This project outlines three domains, or phases. The first phase is planning, the second is implementation, and the third is evaluation. There will be implementation problems restructuring educational systems to allow for the effective participatory decision making processes. According to Blumberg (1969)

> Changes in processes, problems, costs, and benefits develop when the decision-making prerogatives in a school are shifted from a hierarchical pattern to a participative one in which the principal shares power with the teachers (p. 39).

Training will be necessary. Some current staff members will be unable or unwilling to adapt to the new management structure. However, the problems are dwarfed when considered in relation to the possible benefits. The possibilities for stimulating the creation of new ideas for instructional programs are exciting. The opportunities to truly change the way educational services are delivered are endless. As stated by Kanter (1983) "involving grass roots employees on participative teams with control over their own outcomes helps the organization to get and use more ideas to improve performance and increase future skills" (p. 241).

DISCUSSION

Participatory decisions, if arrived at properly, can improve instruction by creating ownership in those responsible for teaching and learning. Teacher morale and performance will be higher. Staffing and teaching flexibility will increase. Teacher and student productivity will increase. As teachers have the opportunity to gain greater insight into school operation they will have greater status in the organization and will therefore have greater self worth (Sachs, 1966). Decision making will improve because of increased flow of information and of additional viewpoints (Lewis, 1989). In addition, shared decisions may help teachers

learn to share in other areas, for example, perhaps instruction and discipline techniques. The development of collaborative, collegial relationships among faculty is an extra benefit derived for shared responsibilities (Smith & Scott, 1990).

The principal using participatory decision making should not be as concerned with "certainties as with "possibilities." Consequently, goals are not "givens" but constraints within which the administrator functions (Perrow, 1982). However, the principal must give decision making power to the group with all the awareness and honesty the administrator can muster. Blumberg (1969) stated that "if a supportive and honest environment is created, the probability exists that teachers will be eager to take part in changing the traditional bureaucratic pattern of operating a school" (p. 49). "The practical question is no longer one of whether to use groups, but rather how to use them more effectively in decision making" (Hall & Williams, 1970, p. 40).

In the words of James Guthrie (1986), "Unless policies are identified that unleash productive local initiatives, the reform movement seems likely to lose its momentum. And the loss of momentum will end virtually all short-term prospects for sustaining citizens' confidence in the schools and for generating additional public resources for them" (p. 308).

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PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING: A MODEL

HAS PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING WORKED?

1. **Student achievement--unchanged**
2. **Improved working relations**
3. **Better community support**
4. **Increased staff support**
5. **Change is more acceptable**